

# FAQ: Arab Citizens of Israel

This FAQ focuses on Arab citizens of Israel. For information about Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, see [FAQ: Who Are the Palestinians?](#)

## TERMINOLOGY

### What are some names for Arab citizens of Israel?

Palestinian citizens of Israel, Israeli Arabs, Israeli Palestinians, Arab Israelis, and Palestinian Israelis. Each of these names, while referring to the same group of people, connotes something different.<sup>1</sup>

### Why might someone identify as an Arab citizen of Israel or a Palestinian citizen of Israel?

“Arab citizen of Israel” emphasizes an Arab cultural identity and secondarily recognizes Israeli citizenship status. “Palestinian citizen of Israel” emphasizes a distinct Palestinian national identity and secondarily recognizes Israeli citizenship status.

### Why might someone identify as an Israeli Arab or Israeli Palestinian?

In the wake of the October 7 massacres, some Arab citizens of Israel who previously had identified as Arab Israelis or Palestinian Israelis declared that thereafter they identified as Israeli Arabs or Israeli Palestinians (see, for example, [Nas Daily](#)).

## DEMOGRAPHY

### How many Arab citizens of Israel are there?

Arab citizens of Israel represent the largest ethnic minority in the country at about 21% of the total population, or approximately 2 million people.

### Where do Arab citizens of Israel live?

More than half of all Arab citizens of Israel live in the North and Galilee regions, particularly in cities and towns like Nazareth and Umm el-Fahm which are predominantly inhabited by Arabs. About 20%, particularly Bedouins, live in the Negev. Approximately 10% live in “mixed cities,” that are inhabited by Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel; these cities include Haifa, Lod, and Jaffa.<sup>2</sup>

### Are all Arab citizens of Israel Muslim?

Most Arab citizens of Israel are Muslim, but many embrace other ethnicities and religions. The **Druze** are one ethno-religious minority of about 150,000. **Arab Christians** number around 140,000. Other Arab citizens of Israel include the **Bedouins**, traditionally pastoral nomadic Arab tribes, of whom there are between 200,000 and 250,000.

## LEGAL STATUS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

### What is the legal status of Arab citizens of Israel?

Officially, Arab citizens of Israel have legal rights and status equal to all other Israeli citizens. They have Israeli identity cards and passports, are eligible to vote and run in local and national elections, pay taxes, and have freedom of movement within Israel. Unlike most Jewish Israelis, they are not required to serve in the IDF, and therefore do not receive certain rights and benefits reserved for military veterans. Despite their legal standing, Arab citizens of Israel do experience socio-economic discrimination. The [Nation-State Basic Law \(2018\)](#)—which, among other things, designates Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people and codifies Arabic not as an official state language but as possessing “special status”—has been referenced as evidence of legal and social discrimination.

### Who represents Arab citizens of Israel politically?

Historically, Arab citizens of Israel have lower voter turnout in national elections than Jewish Israelis, leading to inconsistent electoral impact. Arab-majority parties have never held more than 15 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. Arab voter turnout reached its peak in 2020 when 65% of Arab citizens of Israel cast ballots. In 2022, this number fell to 53% (compared to 71% of the total Israeli electorate). In the same election cycle, 86% of Arab voters cast their votes for Arab-majority parties, while the rest supported Jewish-majority parties. In 2021, Ra’am, a conservative Islamist party led by Mansour Abbas, became the first Arab party to join a governing coalition in Israel.

To learn more about Arab citizens of Israel, see [“Exploring the Topics of Arab Citizens and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel”](#) created by The iCenter and the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF). The IATF has also created [educational resources and collected stories](#) of Arab citizens of Israel during and after the October 7 massacre.

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<sup>1</sup> In this FAQ, we use the term Arab citizens of Israel for the sake of consistency. Based on the work of the [Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues](#), the term “Arab citizens of Israel” seems to best express the “national and familial connections [of this group] to the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Gaza and elsewhere” while recognizing their “unique identity as citizens of Israel alongside the country’s Jewish majority.”

<sup>2</sup> [“Exploring the Topics of Arab Citizens and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel”](#) from IATF and The iCenter